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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Proposals for priority themes for future sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15, makes suggestions for the future priority themes of the Commission and provides information to facilitate the Commission's discussion of the possibility of conducting a review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2015. In addition the report makes proposals for the Commission's consideration of the question of a review of its working methods.

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I. Future priority themes of the Commission on the Status of Women

1. The Commission on the Status of Women plays a central role in monitoring, reviewing and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at all levels. The use of a multi-year programme of work with the selection of themes for the Commission's consideration over some three to five years enables Governments and other actors to undertake timely preparatory and effective follow-up processes that strengthen interaction among different stakeholders, facilitate the identification of gaps and challenges and determination of further actions and initiatives for accelerating progress. The Commission has regularly adjusted the format of its multi-year programme of work to respond to new opportunities and to help accelerate more effectively the implementation of the Platform for Action and subsequent policy commitments, including by reducing the number of priority themes considered at each session and by adding reviews of the implementation of agreed conclusions adopted on previously considered priority themes.

2. The Commission on the Status of Women has used multi-year programmes of work since 1987. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/203, a multi-year programme of work was adopted for the period 1997-2000 which took up a cluster of the critical areas of concern from the Beijing Platform for Action at each session, in a focused and thematic approach (see Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6). In 2001, the Commission developed a multi-year programme of work for the period 2002-2006, building on the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (see Assembly resolutions S-23/2, annex, and S-23/3, annex), and taking up two priority themes per session. At its fiftieth session, in 2006, the Commission, in response to General Assembly resolution 60/140, approved the multi-year programme of work for the period 2007-2009 (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/9) that included consideration of one priority and one review theme per year. In its resolution 2009/15, the Council set out the priority and review themes for the period 2010-2014. In the same resolution, the Council also decided that, at its fifty-seventh session, in 2013, the Commission would decide on the priority themes for future sessions.

3. Accordingly, the Commission's themes for its fifty-eighth session in 2014 have already been determined, namely, "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls" as the priority theme; and "Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work" as the review theme (agreed conclusions from the fifty-fifth session). The fifty-ninth session of the Commission, in 2015, may be devoted to a comprehensive review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action (see paras. 13-21 below).

4. The selection of priority themes is of critical importance in enabling the Commission to make forward-looking contributions to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, in a manner that best responds to current trends and developments. During 2014 and 2015, a number of processes and events will provide opportunities to gain insights and identify trends and new findings that

should inform the Commission's selection of its future priority themes. These will emerge from the Commission's own work, in particular its consideration of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls, as well as from the comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Furthermore, in the second half of 2015, the General Assembly is expected to take significant decisions in regard to the post-2015 development framework, including in particular in regard to sustainable development goals and the relevant links and relationship to the follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals.

5. Given its important role as a catalyst in support of gender mainstreaming, the priority themes the Commission selects for future sessions can be a channel for the Commission to contribute to the implementation of the post-2015 development framework from a gender perspective, especially since the General Assembly, in its resolution 67/148, called for the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women to feature prominently in discussions on the post-2015 development framework. They can be an opportunity for the Commission to engage with, and contribute to, follow-up and implementation processes and thus to achieving greater policy coherence, including at the country level.

6. For these reasons, the Commission, at its fifty-seventh session in 2013, may wish to decide on a priority theme for 2016 only, in order to provide ample time for all stakeholders, including Member States at the national level, to undertake the necessary preparations. At the same time, the Commission may wish to request the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission, in 2016, proposals for future themes that take into consideration the findings of the comprehensive review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2015, as well as any opportunities to enhance gender perspectives within the post-2015 development framework.

7. Accordingly, the priority and review themes proposed for 2016 are, respectively: (a) "Women's economic empowerment and sustainable development"; and (b) "The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls" (which is also the 2013 priority theme).

8. In paragraph 3 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled "The future we want" (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex), States recognized the need to further mainstream sustainable development at all levels, integrating economic, social and environmental aspects and recognizing their interlinkages, so as to achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions. In paragraph 13 of the outcome document, States also agreed that opportunities for people to influence their lives and future, participate in decision-making and voice their concerns are fundamental for sustainable development.

9. The proposal for the priority theme is based on a number of considerations. Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals and any other goals that may be established as part of the post-2015 development framework. The transformational changes needed for sustainable development will require the empowerment and leadership of women who are key custodians and decision makers on the use of water, energy and other resources. In recognition of this, the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability noted that "Any serious shift

towards sustainable development requires gender equality" and recognized gender equality as one of the fundamentals of development (see A/66/700, para. 17 (f)).

10. Women's economic empowerment through equitable access to assets, decent employment, and services — land, water, technology, innovation and credit, banking and financial services — will strengthen their position and voice in decision-making processes about sustainable development at the community, national and global levels. The benefits of strengthened women's participation accrue not just for women, but also for men and children. These include gains in the economic stability of households and families, in the economy, in health and well-being, and in overall quality of life. The World Economic Forum reports that across 135 countries, greater gender equality correlates positively with per capita gross national product.[1]

11. The post-2015 development framework provides an opportunity to address the role of women's economic empowerment in sustainable development. However, achieving women's economic empowerment is not a "quick fix" and will require strategies that are tailored and suited to particular regions and contexts. It will take sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment from all development actors. Innovative approaches and partnerships are also needed.

12. By focusing on women's economic empowerment and sustainable development as its priority theme, the Commission would bring together issues cutting across several critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action, including women and poverty, women and the environment, women and the economy and women in power and decision-making. The outcome of the Commission would directly contribute to the follow-up process to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, as well as to the work of implementation of the post-2015 development framework.

II. Possibility of a review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2015

13. In 2013, the Commission is requested to discuss the possibility of conducting in 2015 a review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15). In addition, in its resolution 67/148, the General Assembly encouraged Member States to consider the appropriate commemorative activities for the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in the context of Council resolution 2009/15.

14. Every five years since the Fourth World Conference on Women, a comprehensive review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has taken place at the global level. A comprehensive review of the Platform for Action on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of its adoption would therefore be in line with the current practice of the Commission.

[1] Ricardo Hausmann, Laura D. Tyson and Saadia Zahidi, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2012*, World Economic Forum, 2012, available from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf.

15. In 2000, the five-year review took the form of a special session of the General Assembly (see General Assembly resolution 52/231). The Commission on the Status of Women served as the preparatory committee for the event.

16. The 10-year review in 2005 was conducted by the Commission in accordance with its multi-year programme of work (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2001/4) which included a review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and consideration of current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls. Based on resolution 48/5 of the Commission (see E/CN.6/2004/14, chap. I.C), the review was carried out through the expanded use of interactive dialogue, with broad-based participation of governmental delegations at the highest level of responsibility and expertise and of civil society and organizations within the United Nations system. The review emphasized the sharing of experiences and good practices in efforts to overcome the remaining challenges of implementation. The Declaration adopted by the Commission at its forty-ninth session on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Economic and Social Council decision 2005/232) was transmitted to the General Assembly and to the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the review of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

17. The 15-year review in 2010 was initiated by the Economic and Social Council through a request to the Commission (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/9). Based on a subsequent proposal by the Commission and a decision by the Council in 2009, the Commission conducted a 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The review also served as the Commission's contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15). Based on resolution 53/1 on preparations for the fifty-fourth session (see E/CN.6/2009/15, chap. I.C), the Bureau of the Commission held informal consultations with all member States and observer States of the Commission on the modalities of the review, and agreed on its format and outcome. The review emphasized the sharing of experiences and good practices, with a view to overcoming remaining obstacles and new challenges, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals (see resolution 53/1). The Declaration adopted by the Commission on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women was endorsed by the General Assembly (see Economic and Social Council decision 2010/232 and General Assembly resolution 65/191). A commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was held in the form of a commemorative meeting of the General Assembly during the fifty-fourth session of the Commission, on 2 March 2010.

18. Review and appraisal processes to mark the five-yearly anniversaries of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have benefited considerably from the work consistently undertaken by the five regional commissions and their outputs. Plans are already being made in all regions to ensure comprehensive efforts at assessing progress and intensifying action towards full and effective implementation of the commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women. These include the development of a common questionnaire to solicit inputs from Member States in the course of 2013, and the subsequent preparation of

regional reports for presentation to regional intergovernmental meetings. While the dates for such meetings remain to be determined, several regional commissions anticipate that they will take place in 2014 (Economic Commission for Africa, Economic Commission for Europe and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific). In addition to the overall regional reports, other preparatory activities at the regional level may include the convening of expert group meetings and the preparation of background papers on selected topics.

19. As the secretariat of the Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) will lead preparatory work for a 20-year review, including substantive preparations and United Nations system-wide coordination and contributions. UN-Women will provide support to Member States at the national level, upon request, through its field offices and thus effectively further strengthen and enhance the integration of its normative support and operational functions. As was the case for the 10- and 15-year reviews, UN-Women would again coordinate and collaborate with the regional commissions in the development of a common questionnaire and use the inputs from Member States for the preparation of a global report on progress in implementation, for submission to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-ninth session, in 2015.

20. The Commission on the Status of Women may wish to consider undertaking a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session in 2015. In doing so, the Commission may wish to place a specific focus on new and emerging issues and how those impact the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission may wish to encourage strong national-level preparations, as well as a regional focus in the 20-year review and appraisal to ensure that the regional reviews and outcomes of the regional-level intergovernmental processes adequately feed into the global-level review.

21. The Commission may also wish to discuss commemorative activities for the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In that regard, the Commission may in particular wish to consider opportunities for exercising its catalytic role in gender mainstreaming towards ensuring that processes that will take place in 2015, including those pertaining to the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 development framework, fully incorporate gender equality and the empowerment of women.

III. Methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women

22. The methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women are governed by a number of resolutions of the Economic and Social Council, the Commission's own decisions, as well as by established practice. The Commission last revised its working methods in 2006, recognizing that the organization of its work should contribute to accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, as called for in the Declaration adopted at the 10-year review and appraisal in 2005 (see Economic and Social Council decision 2005/232). In 2009,

following the review of the functioning of its revised methods of work, it was decided that the Commission should, from its fifty-fourth session onwards, maintain those working methods (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15). In the same resolution, the Council also decided that the Commission should continue to keep its working methods under review.

23. Under its current methods of work, the Commission considers one priority theme at each session, with a negotiated outcome in the form of agreed conclusions. It also holds a high-level round table on experiences, lessons learned and good practices related to the priority theme, including results with supporting data. Ways and means to accelerate the implementation of previous commitments with regard to the priority theme are addressed in two interactive expert panels. The general discussion on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly also has an enhanced emphasis on implementation in relation to the priority theme.

24. Also at each session, the Commission reviews the implementation of the agreed conclusions from a previous session, thus enhancing its monitoring role and strengthening accountability for action. The review takes place in the form of an interactive dialogue, with a moderator's summary of the discussion as the outcome.

25. The third thematic element of each session focuses on an emerging issue pertinent to gender equality and the empowerment of women, which is identified intersessionally by the Bureau of the Commission, in consultation with regional groups. The outcome of the consideration is in the form of a moderator's summary.

26. At the request of the Commission, a panel event is organized by UN-Women on the margins of each annual session, on the priority theme of the following session for Member States and other participants to engage in preliminary discussions on the theme.

27. In addition, the Commission regularly follows up on resolutions and decisions of the Economic and Social Council, and provides inputs and contributions to the Council's work, as applicable. The Commission also considers communications on the status of women, and appoints a working group for this purpose.

28. Since 2006, the Commission has gained extensive experience and insights in the use of its methods of work, including the use of interactive panels and dialogues to examine progress as well as remaining gaps and challenges in implementation; ways for enhancing implementation through the use of reviews of previous agreements; the participation of representatives of non-governmental organizations in different aspects of the work of the Commission; and the use of different formats for its outcomes, including agreed conclusions, resolutions and moderator's summaries. These experiences and insights could be harnessed to further enhance the impact of the work of the Commission and its role as a primary intergovernmental body for the promotion of gender equality. Further refinements to the Commission's working methods could also provide a stronger basis for the Commission to provide coherent support to the Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2012/30).

29. In order to support the Commission in a further review of its working methods, the Commission may wish to request the Secretary-General to submit a report to its fifty-eighth session, including ways and means for further enhancing the impact of the work of the Commission.